

Writing Themes

Think themes!

A topic is the subject matter for communication. The theme is the main message about the subject matter. The theme answers the question “so what?” in regard to the topic.

Example:

<i>Topic:</i>	<i>Tidal Flows</i>
<i>Extended topic:</i>	<i>Creatures affected by tidal flows</i>
<i>Theme:</i>	<i>Every turn of the tide brings life or death.</i>

Understanding the difference between a topic or extended topic (the information, the subject matter) and a theme (the particular message you want to communicate about the topic) is necessary before you have a go at writing themes.

It's a different way of thinking – thematic thinking! And it helps visitors make sense of things.

How to write a theme

Brainstorm a wide range of relevant topics – it's a way of casting a wide net. Then write themes about what your topics stand for.

Practice finishing this sentence stem to write themes (whole ideas):

When it comes to this visitor experience, it is really, really, REALLY important that visitors leave here understanding or thinking or feeling

THAT _____

[this is the theme – a complete sentence that conveys ‘the moral to the story’]

The more you practice, the easier it will get. Remember to express it simply – it's often more effective if you keep it casual.

How to write a strong theme

When your theme conveys a conclusion or message that really matters to the visitor, then it really has an impact on their experience.

Strong themes make links between tangible elements (the physical ingredients they can see and touch) and the intangible qualities (those that are symbolic or represent beliefs and values that are a universal part of our human experience).

Examples are:

In a world where people are losing their connection to nature, Mount Wellington brings wildness to Tasmania's capital city.

Hobart is at the frontline of climate change. It is a sentinel community, watching over the changes to our global climate and communicating them to the world.

Applying the test

Check whether or not you've written a theme –

- Is it a complete sentence, with a subject, verb and full stop? It can be more than one sentence but should still be focussed.
- Is it communicating one idea only?
- Does it reveal something significant about the subject matter?
- Is it relevant to your audience – does it speak to them and their lives?